

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BAGHDA 00283 120859Z
ACTION NEA-10

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FM USINT BAGHDAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4158

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 0283

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, IZ, SY, IR

SUBJECT: INCIDENTS AT NAJAF AND KERBALA

REF: BAGHDAD 0271

1. BAGHDAD MEDIA EVENING OF FEBRUARY 10 AND MORNING
OF FEBRUARY 11 FEATURE CONDEMNATION BY WIDE RANGE OF
IRAQIS OF ALLEGED SYRIAN SPONSORSHIP OF ATTEMPT TO
BOMB MOSQUE OF HUSSEIN IN KERBALA. PROMINENT ATTENTION
IS ACCORDED TO STATEMENTS BY SHIA RELIGIOUS FIGURES
DENOUNCING BOMB ATTEMPT.

2. CLASHES BETWEEN SHIA MUSLIMS AND IRAQI AUTHORITIES
HAVE NOT BEEN UNCOMMON ON DAYS OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES.
BAATH PARTY HAS BEEN TRYING TO ELIMINATE WHAT IT
VIEWS AS EXCESSES OF RELIGIOUS FANATICISM, ES-
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PECIALLY TRADITIONAL SHIA PRACTICES OF SELF-
FLAGELLATION IN PROCESSIONS COMMEMORATING
MARTYRDOM OF HUSSEIN. SOME OF OUR IRAQI SOURCES
BELIEVE THAT RECENT INCIDENTS IN NAJAF AND
KERBALA RESULTED FROM DISAGREEMENTS OVER LIMITS
ON RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES WHICH THEN ESCALATED INTO
ANTI-REGIME CHANTING AND, EVENTUALLY, INTO EXCHANGES

OF GUNFIRE. USINT SOURCE WITH CLOSE LINKS TO IRAQI INTELLIGENCE AGREES THAT SUCH GRIEVANCES, EXIST, BUT HE MAINTAINS THAT SYRIAN AGITATORS TOOK ADVANTAGE OF SITUATION AND ORGANIZED AN UNPROVOKED ATTACK ON NAJAF POLICE STATION. HE PREDICTS THAT GOI WILL PRODUCE ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE IN A FEW DAYS ON ATTEMPTED BOMBING IN KERBALA, PROBABLY INCLUDING PUBLIC CONFESSION BY ALLEGED SYRIAN AGENT. HE UNSURE WHETHER AUTHORITIES WILL RELEASE ANY STATEMENT ON NAJAF SHOOTING FRAY BUT STATES THAT BAATH PARTY CADRES HAVE BEEN INFORMED BY CONFIDENTIAL CIRCULAR. IN FEB. 8 AND FEB. 9 USINT STAFF NOTICED SHARP INCREASE IN POLICE ACTIVITY AT ROAD BLOCKS AND POLICE CHECK POINTS IN BAGHDAD. ACCORDING TO SOURCE, THIS WAS PART OF MASSIVE POLICE EFFORT TO LOCATE "THOSE RESPONSIBLE" FOR INSTIGATING THE TROUBLES AT NAJAF AND KERBALA.

3. WE HAVE BEEN GETTING REPORTS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES THAT SECURITY SITUATION IS ALSO TENSE IN KURDISH AREAS. AMCITS WHO HAVE RECENTLY BEEN IN SULEIMANIYA AND KURKUK REPORT THAT TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF CITIES AFTER DARK IS EXTREMELY DANGEROUS, AND ONE AMCIT REPORTS GUNFIRE IN KIRKUK. USINT INTELLIGENCE SOURCE MAINTAINS THAT CALM PREVAILS WITHIN NORTHERN CITIES BUT THAT BOTH FOREIGNERS AND IRAQIS SHOULD BE CAREFUL OUTSIDE OF MAJOR CITIES. HE SAID THAT GOI BELIEVES THERE ARE ABOUT 400 ADHERENTS OF JALAL TALABANI NOW ACTIVE IN THE RURAL AREAS AND EXPECTS THAT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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GOVERNMENT WILL MOUNT A MOPPING-UP OPERATION IN APRIL.

4. COMMENT: IRAQI AUTHORITIES ARE CLEARLY CONCERNED ABOUT INABILITY TO MAINTAIN TOTAL CONTROL OF SECURITY SITUATION. THEY WILL NO DOUBT CONTINUE TO ACCUSE SYRIANS OF BEING BEHIND INCIDENTS. IN FACT, DISCONTENT AGAINST IRAQI REGIME ARISES FROM A NUMBER OF CAUSES, ALTHOUGH IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE SYRIAN REGIME HAS ON OCCASION TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THESE DISCONTENTS TO PURSUE ITS VENDETTA AGAINST IRAQI REGIME. WILEY

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